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ABSTRACT

Following the early success of its inclusion of languages in the master's-level business administration curriculum, Baylor University began to emphasize foreign language study more heavily in its undergraduate business administration program. The revised program, to be fully implemented in 1989, encourages students to choose 11 hours of language study over a battery of courses in the humanities and social sciences. The anticipated result is that students will attain an intermediate (level 1) to advanced (level 2) rating on the Foreign Service Institute-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (FSI-ACTFL) proficiency scale. The new intermediate-level courses developed for the program focus on the development of speaking, listening, and reading skills, but do not include formal grammar review or composition. Specific business texts are used. Instruction is entirely in the target language, and conversations are based on specific business roles and situations, or on a reading assignment. Other class activities include visits by foreign language speakers, a library visit, videotapes about current events or popular programs in another language, outside readings, and, in one case, a visit to a French-American Chamber of Commerce meeting. (MSE)

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INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES FOR BBA STUDENTS

by

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Intermediate-Level Foreign Language Courses for BBA Students

by

Manuel J. Ortuño and David M. Uber

Before my colleague and I turn to our main topic, intermediate-level foreign language courses for undergraduate business administration students, let me first give you some information about the university where these courses are being taught.

Baylor University, in central Texas midway between Dallas and Austin, has an enrollment of approximately 11,500 students. About 1,500 are graduate and professional students and about 10,000 are undergraduates. In 1987 some 500 graduate and professional degrees were awarded, and of these, approximately 150 or 30% were business related, MBA's, MS's in Economics, and so on. During the same period, some 2,000 bachelor's degrees were awarded, and of these, roughly 800 or 40% were BBA's. The few figures just quoted begin to tell the story of how important business studies are to the university.

A dozen years ago, various entities within Baylor University which were engaged in graduate education, among them the School of Business and the Department of Political Science, began making an effort to internationalize their programs of study. In conjunction with one another, Business and Political Science put together a master's program in International Management. One of the degree requirements decided upon was proficiency in a foreign language. The Department of Foreign Languages was contacted during the planning stages and asked to contribute

in the areas of language instruction and testing. In addition, the directors of the proposed program indicated quite clearly the kind of foreign language proficiency they wanted their students to have. I recall their sending me as guidelines a couple of Xeroxed pages from the catalog of the Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University which outlined the levels of speaking and reading proficiency it required of its students. Incidently, the Fletcher School drew upon the Foreign Service Institute rating system, and so as you can see, a proficiency based evaluation of foreign language ability began making inroads into academia some years before the concerted and very admirable actions of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

It is especially noteworthy that the initiative, the planning, and even the specifications of the foreign language component for Baylor's Master's of International Management came not from the Department of Foreign Languages, but from the School of Business and the Department of Political Science. I am not suggesting that Foreign Language Departments stand by idly and then bow to the wishes of anyone who decides to set up a program with an international slant. I am suggesting, however, that there are academics in business and other fields who know the value of foreign language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptability and who have good ideas on how to work these skills into their programs of study. Those of us who are professors of foreign languages should identify these individuals, get in touch with them, and encourage and aid them in their endeavors.

Largely because of the success of the Master's of International

Management, several administrators and faculty members of the School of Business began looking for ways to give their undergraduate program an international focus. At first, foreign language was simply added to the list of possible areas of study that would fulfill the humanities and social sciences requirement for the BBA. It quickly became apparent from the small number of students selecting foreign language that a greater incentive was needed. The next step, which produced better results, was to offer BBA students the clear option of taking 11 hours of foreign language in lieu of 6 hours of humanities and social science, 4 hours of natural science, and 1 hour of health and personal development. This coming year, students will be maneuvered even more effectively in the direction of foreign language study because of the way the new edition of the School of Business Bulletin outlines the general, non-professional requirements for the BBA. "Option I" includes 11 hours of foreign language, while "Option II" allows students to substitute for the foreign language certain courses in humanities, social and natural sciences, and health and personal development. The idea conveyed is that foreign language study is preferable and indeed expected.

The question that immediately comes to mind is: "At what level of proficiency will a student be after only 11 semester hours, that is, after slightly less than 200 50-minute periods of foreign language instruction?" The answer depends, of course, on what kind of foreign language preparation he or she has to begin with, which courses are taken, and how much work is actually done in the courses.

Let's look at two cases, one from either end of the spectrum. The student with little or no prior preparation would enroll in our standard eight-hour, two-course sequence in elementary foreign language and then follow up with a three-hour, intermediate-level course designed especially for business students. I have had students of Spanish who have traveled this route, and those who made a good effort attained a speaking, reading, and cultural proficiency of 1 or Intermediate on the Foreign Service Institute-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages rating scale. Time will not permit me to quote a full description of this level of proficiency, but it is characterized by FSI and ACTFL as consisting of the ability "to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands." Let's turn now to the student who has had several years of productive foreign language instruction in high school. He or she would begin with the three-hour, intermediate-level course in foreign language for business. Then he or she might follow up with a standard three-hour conversation course. I have had students of Spanish who have come this far, and I would still rate them 1 or Intermediate. If, however, the student were to take the final five hours of the foreign language option in the way I am about to describe, I believe he or she could attain a 2 or Advanced rating. Without going into detail, this level of proficiency encompasses the ability "to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements." Back now to our student, if he or she were to enroll in one of Baylor's five-week summer study programs in France, Germany, or Spain, a rating of 2 or Advanced might well be achieved. The student could take a standard three-hour culture course and a special two-hour,

mostly independent study, course on the business practices of the host country. Let me emphasize that all that has just been said regarding study abroad and the BBA student has not yet taken place and is therefore hypothetical. It is very probable, though, that by the summer of 1989 we will have some BBA students completing the sequence of foreign language courses in this manner.

What I feel is distinctive about Baylor University's foreign language instruction for BBA students is that it strikes a practical balance between the desires and capabilities of each of the parties concerned. The School of Business, through creative leadership and persistence, has succeeded in putting in place a foreign language option that is truly utilitarian but does not compromise either the prebusiness or professional core curriculum. The Foreign Language Department has integrated courses in Intermediate French, German, and Spanish for Business into its standard course offerings in a way which serves the BBA students without neglecting the needs of other students. Finally, the BBA students, I believe, are aware of the advantages of being proficient in a foreign language and, within the constraints of a demanding schedule, make a genuine effort to acquire speaking, reading, and cultural skills, and to combine them with their business studies and their career plans.

Intermediate-Level Foreign Language Courses for BBA Students

Part II

by

Manuel J. Ortuño and David M. Uber

When the new intermediate-level foreign language courses for BBA students ~~was~~ were being developed at Baylor University, the Department of Modern Foreign Languages asked the Business School about course objectives. They replied they would like their students to be able to express themselves in everyday situations suitable to the business world: cashing a check at a bank, making acquaintances and introductions, reservations at an airlines counter, at a restaurant, etc. Second, they wanted their students to be able to read and understand a business article from a journal or magazine. This could be from Expansion a French commerce journal or the business column from L'Express, Spiegel, or Cambio 16. Third, the student should be able to understand the speaker in a foreign language. Thus, the ability to carry on a practical conversation (speaking and listening skills) and to understand a business article. A fourth desire was later added--a broadened cultural overview of the target country (France, Germany, Spain, Latin America). The culture was accessed through readings, videotapes and guest speakers.

By limiting the focus to the development of three skills--speaking, listening and reading--we were able to eliminate a formal grammar review and composition, normally part of a third-semester language class. Because of the specialized nature of

our course, we were also able to target specific business texts and forgo literary and cultural passages. By eliminating the above, we could economize our effort and zero in on developing proficiency skills. Although we felt the necessity to "sneak in" some grammar review, we did this on the sly and it was always ancillary since we had no grammar text. The Spanish and German business texts had brief grammar notes and the French book had no grammar at all. Deep grammatical explanations were shunned and students were not tested on grammar.

Students and instructors immediately felt "instant relief" from grammar, composition and literary discussion omnipresent in traditional third-semester language courses. And all this was legitimate and possible because it was a special course tailored to fit the needs of many business students wanting a terminal language course. They were also receiving credit for this course as a business elective.

All three instructors felt the need to speak entirely in the target language by acting out dialogues or role playing in a specific business situation, and discussing reading assignments. In some classes, the dialogue was memorized in whole or in part, in others it was merely read. In all classes, students improvised a dialogue. Most were based on familiar situations: a telephone conversation, a job interview, banking, inquiring about starting and expanding a business, reserving a room and ordering a meal. Students were often called on to use newly acquired business vocabulary. Dialogues shown on videotape were replayed and stopped at certain points, whereupon the instructor

checked for listening comprehension. Audio tapes could be used as well, however, students responded better to video.

Since one indicator of the student's ability to function at the intermediate level (level 1 in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines) is creating in the language (rather than merely spouting forth memorized chunks of vocabulary or expressions) it is important that students often practice acting out situations. The situations can have much the same form and function as the ACTFL oral proficiency interview cards that many foreign language teachers use and have seen at proficiency workshops.

Situation One: "You are a post office employee. A customer asks you if you can help him or her. You tell him to wait. Then you ask him what he wants." That was a short one involving a one- or two-sentence response. Here's one that is more elaborate.

Situation Two: "You call up (or visit) an insurance broker and you describe the type of insurance you want. You ask the broker to give you an estimate of the premium based on the value of the goods you want insured. You're shocked by his estimate, and you explain that there is no way that you can afford it." Those of us familiar with the ACTFL situation cards will see some similarities:

1. The situation is precise. The instructor obtains a sample of the student's ability to create in the target language.

2. The explanation of the situation is in English so as not to give away key words.

There are, however, some differences. The situations are slanted toward people interested in business opportunities. You are, for example, an insurance broker, a postal employee, or a bank client about to take out a loan or check on a letter of credit. The vocabulary is business specific. Foreign language equivalents of the words "premium," "estimate," and "liability" would make most students cringe or take off and run. I cannot resist quoting the reassuring words at the bottom of the ACTFL situation card that the poor student reads:

> "We realize that you may not have the exact vocabulary for this situation but do the best you can . . . "

Now, I am not saying that the student of the intermediate business foreign language course will keep a steady hand as he nervously reads the situation card. He, however, should have acquired the specific vocabulary during the lesson. Circumlocution is still appropriate in many situations, but from a professional point of view it helps to know the equivalent words for monthly statement or retainer. So what we have tried to do is combine business vocabulary acquisition, a laborious but necessary duty, with the development of communication skills.

One final word about dialogues. Not all instructors use them. Situations, nevertheless, can often take off from dialogues, give the students the chance to create with the language, and use business-specific vocabulary. One way to do situations is to divide the class into groups of two and have them role-play with the teacher standing a respectable distance

away. This is a pleasant change from rapid-fire drilling and tends to reduce anxiety among the language learners.

Receiving much attention today is the development of reading comprehension through the use of pre-reading strategies. Unfortunately, the text books we used had little or no pre-reading exercises. In this course, it is important to overcome the readers' "angst" or fear of confronting a business article in French, German, or Spanish. I remember literally seeing some of my charges sink into their seats the first time we looked at a technical newspaper story.

To lessen this instant anxiety trip, we did what is pretty much coming to be standard operating procedure--to assure students that understanding the gist or the message of the passage is important, not word by word or total comprehension. The identification of cognates, contextual guessing, location and underlining of main sentence or paragraph ideas (of particular importance in business news articles), identification of similar roots, thematically related words, skimming and scanning all help students to overcome their anxiety. Scanning titles and subheadings is a good pre-reading activity and the journalistic summing up of the story in the first paragraph of most articles is also helpful.

Our goal at the outset of the course was to increase reading comprehension skills to the point where the student could pick up a business article at semester's end and understand the gist. Sample business pieces in the textbook were supplemented by current copies of business articles from news magazines and trade journals.

Although much business vocabulary was covered, students had to use these words in context and were required to string together sentences to respond to a particular situation. They could do this reading dialogues and acting out situations. Business terminology was also evident in selected articles that we covered as well as in realia: bank statements, hotel bills, restaurant checks, insurance forms, train tickets, even medicine labels--all used to overcome somewhat the artificiality of the foreign language business class taught in the United States.

Other activities that we experimented with included class visits by foreign language speakers--some of whom were business people. In the Spanish Business Class this was especially successful (I didn't think that Professor Ortuño could tear the speaker away from the students or vice/versa). Many students asked questions and the whole talk was done in the target language. The classes also took a trip to the library to see where foreign language business journals and magazines were kept, watched video tape presentations of current events and even an episode in German of the popular soap Dallas (the oil industry). Students went on their own to the language lab to see the Dallas videotape and had to write a summary of what they heard. We even encouraged students to do outside readings (newspapers, magazines) on economic, social and political structures of the country or region. Finally, a few students also attended a monthly meeting of the Dallas chapter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce and were able to talk and visit with international bankers, lawyers, importers, exporters, members of

the French Trade Commission, even a representative of the Madeleine Bakery Chain. (They had a sweet time.)

The intermediate-level foreign language course for BBA students had a large measure of success for the first time at our university because it was able to attract and motivate students wishing to improve their ability to handle themselves in some routine business situations in French, German, or Spanish. The program succeeded also because it was able to concentrate on developing speaking, listening, and reading skills, while not being shackled to the demands of the traditional second-year course: grammar review and literary readings.

The course will continue, we feel, to be welcomed by BBA students who not only see it as a way to fulfill the new language option in the Hankamer Business School, but also wish to strive toward obtaining an intermediate level of proficiency in the foreign language and who hope to travel and work overseas one day.